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SUBJECT: TURKEY: FORMER PRESIDENT SULEYMAN DEMIRAL STUMPS IN ADANA

¶1. (SBU) In a May 16 keynote speech to kick off his stump around the region, center-right octogenarian former President Suleyman Demirel sung the praises of the Turkish secular state. Speaking for over one hour at Cukurova University before an audience of more than 500 people (approximately 25 percent were students), Demirel offered a message of solidarity and unity for Turkey, calling on the youth to uphold the principles of the Turkish Republic as established by Ataturk.

¶2. (SBU) Citing the continuing lack of clean drinking water, proper education and health facilities in some parts of Turkey, Demirel called on Turks to follow the example of the economically developed countries, whose wealth was based on the three pillars of market economy, democracy and human rights. He recommended that Turkey remove the state from all aspects of the economy in order to allow the market to flourish, and for Turkey to better adapt to world economic forces. Demirel emphasized the importance of entrepreneurial initiative and the education of Turkey's youth, especially in science and technology, as a means to ensure the country's continuing development.

¶3. (SBU) He emphasized that every citizen is a first class citizen, and that there should be no differentiation among people in any part of the country. He said that Turks should distinguish between the people and the terrorist component within society (the PKK), and emphasized that everyone should work for the unity of the state, which should implement the rule of law and abide by the constitution. Demirel criticized Europe for inciting problems within Turkey. He said that Europe has seen Turkey so far as a liberation project for a certain community of people (i.e., Kurds). He added that Europe's meddling in the Kurdish issue was based on two misconceptions: 1) that Turkey's parliament had not been representing the people of Turkey; and 2) that certain people have been deprived of their social rights, such as employment, etc. Nevertheless, Demirel sees the Turkish Republic as a European project, and added that no one in the country yearns for a sharia regime. Demirel made it clear that the state should remain secular and there should be strong barriers between the state and all religions.

¶4. (SBU) An engineer by training, Demiral got his start in politics as a managing engineer on State hydro-electric projects in the Cukurova region.

¶5. Demirel is the grand old man of Turkish politics. He has been active in Turkish politics for forty years, served as Prime Minister and President, and was jailed by the military. His

feel for Turkey's political pulse has been unmatched, except perhaps by PM Erdogan. Media have recently speculated that he is on the comeback trail, perhaps stitching together a center-right coalition to challenge the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). This speech was clear criticism of AKP, as were Demirel's comments in April criticizing the failure of AKP policy on Islamic headscarves. However, Demirel at this point appears to be a has-been unlikely to get much traction; his desire to go out on the stump at the age of 82, however, indicates the importance he attaches to rallying an opposition with teeth that has a chance at defeating AKP.

REID